



## 2013 Downtown Technical Assistance Application Cover Sheet

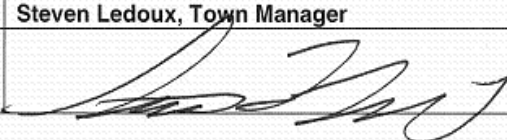
### Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Program

Community Name:	Town of Acton
Date of Application:	09/27/12
Title of Project:	Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan: Implementation for Kelley's Corner, Phase 1. Best Practices and Next Steps towards reshaping Kelley's Corner.

**Principal Contact:** Please print clearly.

Name:	Roland Bartl	Address:	<u>Town of Acton</u>
Title:	Planning Director		<u>Planning Department</u>
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**Name & Signature of the Chief Executive Officer or Chief Elected Official (Required):**

Name & Title:	Steven Ledoux, Town Manager
Signature:	

**(REQUIRED FOR SUBMISSION)** Check one box for the type of assistance being requested:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Improvement District | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative Economy              | <input type="checkbox"/> Parking              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Design             | <input type="checkbox"/> Way finding/Branding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics of Downtown         |   |

See attached program description for more information relating to the designated topics.

**Summary Statement:** Please describe your request in 25 words or less:

This project will equip Acton with a roadmap to help reshape Kelley's Corner to better meet long-standing community goals for a walkable town center.

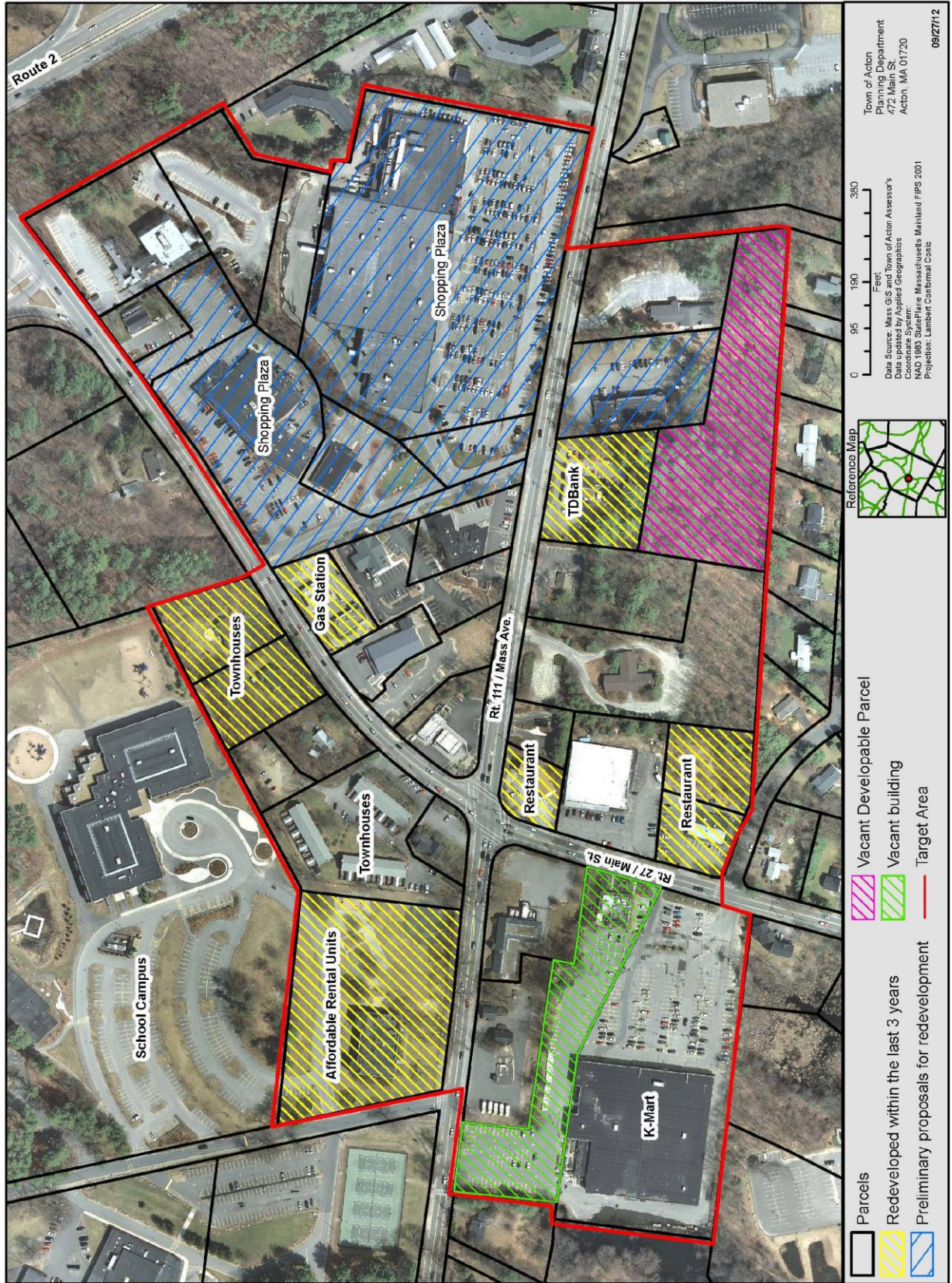
**Application Deadline: 5:00 p.m. on September 28, 2012**





# Kelley's Corner Target Area Map

MDI -Implementation for Kelley's Corner, Phase 1. Best Practices and Next Steps towards reshaping Kelley's Corner.





### **Description of Issue to be Addressed**

The Acton 2020 Comprehensive Plan was adopted at the April 2012 Annual Town Meeting. This request for grant funding under the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Technical Assistance program is a direct response and first implementation step to one of the highest priorities of Acton 2020 – *develop Kelley’s Corner into a mixed use town center and prepare a development plan to accomplish this*. Residents stated they felt the town has no defined town center and expressed a strong desire to establish Kelley’s Corner as their walkable “downtown”. The project will be guided by the Acton Planning Department and the Town’s Acton 2020 (Phase 3) Implementation Committee.

Although, Kelley’s Corner is a compact area, its automobile oriented development pattern stems from the 1960s and earlier, and its infrastructure is tired. Some properties have undergone recent upgrades, facelifts, and redevelopment. Many other properties are ripe for redevelopment. Acton 2020 stresses the high importance that Actonians place on “good design” in any effort to redevelop and further develop Kelley’s Corner into a walkable town center. Equally important is a thorough understanding of its physical and economic conditions so that design guidelines, and zoning standards that flow from them, not only represent the Town’s long-term vision, but also are practical, realistic and effective in the short and medium term.

This project is intended as the first step in the development plan for Kelley’s Corner. With this grant application, the Town of Acton seeks funding for assistance by an experienced urban design professional in developing a framework and roadmap for the Kelley’s Corner development plan that puts town center design at the front and center. At the next (2013) Annual Town Meeting, the Acton Planning Department and the Acton 2020 Implementation Committee will seek Town funding for the Kelley’s Corner Development Plan. This grant project will jumpstart the plan and establish the foundation for a successful Town Meeting outcome.

### **History/Current Status of Kelley’s Corner**

Kelley’s Corner is a mixed use area at the intersection of Rt. 27/Main Street and Rt.

111/Massachusetts Ave. near the geographic center of Acton. Commercial uses dominate the area. Scattered multi-family residences are interspersed. The businesses consist primarily of retail and restaurant uses, extending east from this intersection towards Rt. 2. The Charter Road school campus and residential neighborhoods are adjacent to the commercial developments. Businesses are located in several strip mall shopping developments with a significant amount of paved parking in front. Major tenants are Roche Brothers, T.J.Maxx and CVS. K-Mart shares a large parcel on Main Street with a vacant McDonald’s building just south of the principle intersection. Several smaller buildings on separate parcels contain professional and medical offices, banks, and restaurants. A Sunoco filling station occupies a prominent corner in the intersection. A former muffler shop is now converted to a restaurant, and a bowling alley located on the south side of Rt. 111/Massachusetts Ave. has received a modest facelift. Recent redevelopments for TD Bank and Sovereign Bank forecast a more walkable town center – the bank buildings are at the street and parking/drive-ups are to the side and rear. Three parcels on the west side of Rt. 27/Main Street contain three different multifamily housing developments, two are recent redevelopments from small single-family homes. Kelley’s Corner has been served by sewer since 2002 and has capacity for future development if higher density zoning were allowed.

The Zoning Bylaw currently allows for .40 floor area ratio in Kelley’s Corner and requires design standards when the floor area ratio exceeds .20. This zoning scheme has not been effective. Most

development has not occurred greater than .20. As a result, design standards have not been implemented. There are 2.7 acres of undeveloped land and several parcels with redevelopment potential. Residents have voiced their desire to encourage mixed uses with smaller dwelling units near vibrant shops and restaurants with opportunities for socializing, running errands, dinning, and for community gathering spaces.

Kelley's Corner has been a focus area for the town over the past 17 years:

- In 1995 the Town of Acton and The Land Use Collaborative, with funding through an EOCD Strategic Planning Grant, produced the 1995 Kelley's Corner Specific Area Plan. This document set out goals and objectives for Kelley's Corner regarding aesthetics, economic development, circulation and traffic, wastewater management and environmental protection goals. A main objective was to transform Kelley's Corner into a visually appealing, walkable, center that reflects the character of Acton. The partial adoption of the plan's zoning recommendation led to the current Kelley's Corner zoning scheme.
- In 1997 the Kelley's Corner Circulation Plan was added to address concerns related to traffic management in the area. This plan was debated and updated until 2001. It provided additional zoning recommendations to further the implementation of the Kelley's Corner goals and objectives. The 2001 Town Meeting voted with a majority in favor of these recommendations, but failed to muster the required 2/3rds majority to enact zoning changes.
- Many of the original goals for Kelley's Corner came up once again during the recent Acton 2020 comprehensive planning process. Acton residents expressed their frustration with the current conditions at Kelley's Corner. They voiced their desire for a greater mix of uses where smaller housing units are near vibrant shops and restaurants, for a walkable town center with opportunities for socializing, running errands, dinning, and for community gathering spaces. Residents feel the current environment in Kelley's Corner lacks community space, and the required zoning and design guidelines to cultivate this type of development. The Town wants to direct future growth to Kelley's Corner from outlying areas using the transfer of development rights tool, but realizes the importance of first preparing an economically viable design plan for future development.
- In 2010, in conjunction with the visioning phase of Acton 2020 (Phase 1), the Town collaborated with the Tufts University Department of Urban and Environmental Policy on the graduate student project "Open Neighborhood Project/ReVisioning Kelley's Corner" that resulted in energizing the Town's renewed focus and resolve to tackle the Kelley's Corner challenge.

### **Proposed Project Costs and Scope of Services**

#### **Task 1: Review of Existing Conditions and Planning Goals**

The purpose of this task is to create a set of observations and baseline information about existing conditions in Kelley's Corner. On a parallel track, this step will compile and list Town planning goals which articulate desired changes from those existing conditions. This evaluation will take into account the patterns of existing development, its relationships to existing zoning, and underlying land and development economics.

This evaluation needs to take into account that there are a wide range of conditions, some of which are substantial barriers to change. For example, many of the sites are built out with active retail and commercial uses that will be difficult to substantially develop in the short or mid-term because of

the business and economic factors in play. Other sites are clearly underutilized, and may be subject to redevelopment in the short term. In between these circumstances, a number of properties are subject to modification rather than complete redevelopment.

Specific tasks to be accomplished include:

- Preparation of a study base plan.
- Review of existing zoning and preparation of written observations regarding the relationship to existing conditions and Town goals.
- Preparation of a list of Town goals for the area from previous plans and initiatives.
- Topography of existing site and development conditions.

#### Task 2: Case Studies

A series of case studies will be prepared of successful site improvements and redevelopments that have occurred within similar site and economic conditions for use as a source of ideas and reference. The case studies will evaluate improvements and redevelopment that would better match the Town's goals than undesirable current conditions. The examples may be from New England or may be national examples of moderate or low scale redevelopment or compact mixed use. Approximately five to seven case studies will be prepared including photographs or information regarding both the "before" and "after" conditions, methods used to reshape the areas, and applicable lessons for consideration. Project types will include:

- Modifications for conversion of "strip commercial" developments.
- Reorganization of auto-oriented site design to pedestrian-oriented configurations.
- Infill development for mixed-use to create a more vital district.
- Parking strategies to serve mixed-use districts.

#### Task 3: Design Guide Framework

In this task, a series of potential design guidelines will be prepared for the Town's consideration and potential adoption, or use for further refinement. The guidelines will consist of a series of site planning, site design, and basic architectural guidelines that would help reshape the character and quality of the district. The guidelines will be drawn from a variety of sources and will include specific concepts tailored to Kelley's Corner. The guidelines will address two conditions:

- Modifications to existing development.
- New development.

The documents will be intended as a communication tool and will be approximately ten pages in length along with examples and illustrations of desirable outcomes.

As a separate deliverable, an information paper will be prepared describing different methods for using design guidelines and standards that might be considered by the Town over time. This paper will also include recommendations for refinements in the existing zoning to better align future development with Town goals.

#### Task 4: Public Presentation and Discussion

Findings and observations assembled during this process will be the subject of an open public forum and discussions. A PowerPoint presentation will be prepared to present the following:

- A summary of key existing conditions and issues relative to Town goals.
- Case studies of successful redevelopment in similar circumstances.
- Summary of guidelines and their respective use.

- Open discussion including questions and answers.
- Resolution of outline and timetable for next steps.

#### *Summary of deliverables*

- *Base plans.*
- *Graphic and written observations on key issues and relationship to Town goals.*
- *Written and photographic summaries of five to seven case studies.*
- *Design Guide.*
- *Summary of observations on guidelines use and implications for zoning.*
- *PowerPoint summary presentation.*
- *Next steps chart*

#### **Project Budget**

Task 1:	\$2,000
Task 2:	\$2,000
Task 3:	\$4,500
Task 4:	\$1,500
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>

#### **Evidence of strong public/private partnerships**

Two private developers have approached the town with preliminary proposals; one new commercial development on the south side of Rt. 111/Mass Ave. and a shopping plaza façade and parking modernization scheme on the north side of Rt.111/Mass Ave. Both private developers have expressed their support for the Town’s redevelopment and planning efforts. They have supported the town’s recent submission for a Mass Works Infrastructure Grant to address Pedestrian Improvements. Both have indicated they are willing to provide some level of financial assistance to improve pedestrian and vehicular mobility. Another developer with property on the west side of Rt. 27/Main Street has offered to retrofit concrete sidewalks with granite curbing along his property to match the adjacent residential development.

#### **Positive outcomes expected as a result of the requested assistance**

The tangible outcomes listed under the “Summary of Deliverables” will help the town make the appropriate next steps to proceed with the Kelley’s Corner development plan, design guidelines, zoning changes and infrastructure improvements.

#### **Demonstration of a community’s ability to begin implementation of recommended action(s) within one to three months of completion of grant.**

Actonians have identified the redevelopment of Kelley’s Corner as one of their highest priorities and are ready to take action. The Acton 2020 Phase III Implementation Committee was recently established to carry out these priority goals. This committee will help drive the Kelley’s Corner redevelopment project. The Planning Department has staff available to assist the design consultant through the technical assistance phase and to support the committee through the recommended next steps. The Department has recently purchased visualization software to support community scenario planning efforts in response to this priority. The town will move forward immediately following the completion of this technical assistance grant by requesting funds at the next Town Meeting for continuing design consultant services.

**Support DHCD and commonwealth's priorities and initiatives, commonwealth's sustainable development principles**

This project is consistent with several commonwealth priorities and initiatives, specifically those set out in the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles and the MetroFuture Plan. The Town of Acton strives to follow these goals by focusing growth in the established center at Kelley's Corner which in turn will relieve development pressures from limited open space elsewhere in town. The Town of Acton understands that providing clear design guidelines and an overall design plan for Kelley's Corner will allow for predictable permitting, ultimately generating an economically vibrant mixed-use town center.

## *Supported Documentation Referenced*

### **Acton 2020 Comprehensive Plan**

**Pg. ES-8**

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-35852/ActonCommunityPlan%20-%20Volume1.pdf>

### **Acton 2020 Website**

<http://acton2020.org/>

### **Town of Acton Zoning Bylaw Amended through April 2012**

**Pg. 83**

<http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/659>

### **1994 Kelley's Corner Specific Area Plan**

**Pg. 3-4**

<http://ma-acton.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/Home/View/116>

### **1997 Kelley's Corner Circulation and 2001 Revised Kelley's Circulation**

<http://ma-acton.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/Home/View/117>

### **2010 Open Neighborhood Project/ReVisioning Kelley's Corner with Tufts University Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning**

<http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/864>